

## Creative People – Ten Antithetical Traits

In his book *Creativity: The Work and Lives of 91 Eminent People*, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi describes creative people as having the unusual capacity to adapt to almost any situation and to make do with whatever is at hand to reach their goals. According to Csikszentmihalyi, “complexity” is the one word that best expresses how their personalities differ from those of others. Creative people tend to integrate certain thoughts and actions that are segregated in most people. They are a *conglomerate* of contradictory extremes; instead of being an “individual” each of them is a “multitude.” Csikszentmihalyi identifies 10 antithetical traits that creative people integrate in dialectical tension. The traits are described as follows:

1. Creative people demonstrate a great deal of physical energy but they also rest often and sleep a lot. In short they control their energy. They view periods of reflection and idleness as important for the success of their work.
2. Creative people are smart and naïve at the same time. They demonstrate both wisdom and childlikeness. In his study of the major creative geniuses of this century, Howard Gardner noted that a certain immaturity, both emotional and mental, can go hand in hand with the deepest insights.
3. Creative people manage to combine playfulness with discipline, responsibility with irresponsibility. A playfully light attitude is accompanied by a quality of doggedness, endurance, and perseverance.
4. Creative people alternate between imagination and a rooted sense of reality. Csikszentmihalyi notes that new ideas are often viewed as fantasies unrelated to current reality. This is useful because the whole point of art and science is to go beyond what we now consider real in order to create a new reality. What makes a novel idea creative is that when we have conceived it, sooner or later we recognize that, strange as it is, it is true.
5. Creative people tend to be both introverted and extraverted. Most of us tend to prefer either being alone or with others. Creative people like to be both, depending on the time and the situation.
6. Creative people are simultaneously humble and proud. They know that they have accomplished a great deal and yet are aware that they “stand on the shoulders of giants.” Moreover, they are usually so focused on future challenges that past accomplishments are quickly forgotten.
7. Creative people escape rigid gender stereotyping. They tend to be androgynous, both aggressive and nurturant, sensitive and rigid, dominant and submissive.
8. Creative people are both traditional and rebellious. Being only traditional leaves one unchanged. However, taking chances without regard to what has been valued in the past rarely leads to novelty that is recognized as an improvement.
9. Creative people are passionate about their work but extremely objective as well. Without passion we quickly lose interest in a difficult task. Without being objective, our work often is not very good and lacks credibility.
10. Creative people are sensitive, which often exposes them to suffering and pain, yet also leads them to experience a great deal of enjoyment. Being alone at the forefront can expose one to vicious attack and ridicule. At the same time, when one is working in his or her area of expertise, worries and cares are often replaced by a sense of bliss.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1996). *Creativity: The work and lives of 91 eminent people*. New York: HarperCollins.